



Testimony for

Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission Budget

Appropriations Committee, March 5, 2015
Hartford, CT

Senator Bye and Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee – my name is Andrea Contreras and I am the Interim Executive Director of the Hispanic Center of Greater Danbury, Inc. I am here today to speak in support of all the Legislative Commissions and, particularly, on behalf of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission's budget.

We appreciate the fact that Governor Malloy has kept the Commission's budget at current levels. We, however, wish to point out that if we consider the two recent rescissions experienced by the agency, the cuts we sustained during the great recession which total 53% and combine those with the potential biennium cutbacks which total more than \$40,000, not to mention additional potential exposure in the current year, the agency's viability will be negatively impacted.

We are aware that the Appropriations Committee is reviewing major cutbacks in key areas of the state budget, however, we also recognize the growing needs of our population in a number of highly specialized areas that require more, not less, attention from our lawmakers in the halls of power; such as bilingual education, help for ELL and issues of racial profiling which affected Latinos in East Haven. Finally, we wish to point out the severe segregation impacting our state's housing stock. It is in this context that we commend our state elected officials for being good stewards of our budgetary resources and we look forward to finding innovative ways or, outside the box thinking, in order to trim the budget without cutting back on the services for the most vulnerable populations.

An area where the state may be able to gain added revenues is within the state's ECS formula in funding public schools throughout CT. This focus would allow the capture of at least \$21 million in revenues which are currently over-funding some of some municipalities in the State. LPRAC staff has the details as to where this is occurring and can share this information with the committee.

LPRAC's work informs the Legislature and Governor of the needs of one of its steadily growing populations here in the State-the Hispanic population. While the LPRAC has been around for the past 20 years, the work towards empowering the Hispanic community has been going on since 1972 when the first Hispanic legislators such as Maria Sánchez, Juan Figueroa and Edna Negrón won seats in separate election years to the House of Representatives. As an agency that supports the Hispanic Community in the greater Danbury area, we understand the hard work LPRAC does even during economic hardships and we support their work and are always willing to help and collaborate with them. We have been witnessed to their work.

- They have supported recent legislation to assist the community in obtaining drivers only licenses for undocumented Hispanic residents.
- They were at the forefront of a complaint filed against the East Haven Police Department for profiling the Hispanic community in their town and working with the Federal Department of Justice to ensure that the incidents were investigated and changes occurred within the Department to benefit the community overall.
- They have assisted the DREAMERS in realizing their goal of attaining higher education.
- They have hosted turn the curve sessions to identify barriers to Hispanic small businesses obtaining state contracts.
- They are working to find a legislative solution to the lack of affordable housing in areas that would open access to better employment opportunities for our community and for a more fair access to quality schools and a better education for Hispanic children as a result.
- They have also identified, through their RBA work that the ELL formula as it is currently implemented within CT school systems, is ineffective for children trying to learn the English language without enough time to test with a successful grade. The LPRAC is working jointly with legislative and community partners to pass a law that would allow for more time for them to garner proficiency in the language prior to testing their subject knowledge.

These are but a few of the many issues that the LPRAC is working to correct on behalf of their constituents here in the State-the Hispanic community. If the LPRAC sustains further cuts that it would negatively affect the outcomes of this important work on behalf of this growing, vibrant and young community. Connecticut's Hispanic population is one of the youngest with an average of 28 and its future workforce. Their work as well as ours will assist the State in ensuring that this vital community remains here and becomes the workforce for the many corporate and mid-size companies the state is home to.

Sincerely,

Andrea Contreras-Munoz
Hispanic Center of Greater Danbury